

VZCZCXRO9104
OO RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK RUEHMOS
DE RUEHGB #0707/01 0651235
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
O 061235Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3100
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NSC WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000707

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/06/2026

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MIXED SUPPORT FOR JAFARI WITHIN SHIA COALITION AS
KURDS AND SUNNI ARABS READY A COMMON BLOC

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford for
reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The rejection of Shia Prime Minister nominee Ibrahim Jafari by the Kurds, Sunni Arab Tawafuq bloc and the secular Allawi bloc has generated at least initial tough responses from the Shia Islamist Coalition (List 555). There are also hints of flexibility about dumping Jafari. TNA Deputy Speaker Shahrستاني told us March 6 that the Kurds and the Sunni Arabs making their objections public strengthened List 555 solidarity behind the PM as their nominee to head the new government. Shahrستاني predicted that Shia Coalition member parties SCRI and Fadhila would not break ranks over the Jafari nomination lest the parties draw sharp criticism from the Shia religious leaders in Najaf. Coalition member and head of Dawa Tanzim Khudayr Al-Khuzai told PolOff March 5 that rejection of Jafari as PM would be a "humiliation" for all Shia. Khuzai said that if the Presidency calls the Council of Representatives into session while the Kurds, Tawafuq and Allawi list still reject Jafari, List 555 members would boycott the legislature. At a March 5 meeting, Shia Coalition independent Khalid Attiyah called the letters from the Kurds, Sunni Arabs and Allawi rejecting Jafari's nomination as "insulting", but understandable. Attiyah said that while he initially preferred Adil Abd al-Mahdi for the PM nomination, the Deputy President is now "damaged goods" due to his defeat by Jafari in the 555 nomination contest. On March 5 and 6, Tawafuq members Ayad al-Samara'i and Ala' Mekki told Poloff that the Sunni Arab coalition would soon meet with the Kurdish Alliance to work out differences over the program for the proposed National Salvation Front. We expect some intense politicking, but no big decisions, over the next couple of days. END SUMMARY.

SHAHRISTANI: COALITION BACKING JAFARI

12. (C) Hussayn Shahrستاني, one of the seven members of the executive committee of the Shia Islamist Coalition (List 555) told us March 6 that List 555 was standing behind Jafari as its prime minister choice; its leadership reiterated this support in a March 5 meeting. He acknowledged that Jafari was not an ideal choice; Coalition member parties SCIRI and Fadhila were not happy with Jafari. He commented, however, that the Kurds and Sunni Arab Tawaffuq Front should have made their objections to Jafari known privately only. Now that

they have made their opposition public, he claimed, the Shia would rally around Jafari. The Najaf religious leaders want the Shia Coalition to stay united. Thus, he predicted, if SCIRI or Fadhlila breaks ranks over Jafari Najaf would criticize them sharply. Shahrastani did not rule out changing Jafari for another candidate, but a change would have to be by consensus among the Coalition. He warned that many in the South perceive that the Kurds and Sunni Arabs, in league with the Americans, are trying to impose conditions on the Shia Coalition. PolCouns said that the next PM would be the government leader for all Iraqis, not just Shia. The PM was not a choice solely for List 555 to make, just as we expect that the Shia Coalition will have something to say about Sunni Arabs and Kurds brought into the cabinet. Shahrastani did not argue the point but returned to what he called the provocative tactic of sending letters objecting to Jafari.

13. (C) Changing Jafari, if it happens, would also take some time, said Shahrastani. He bitterly criticized the Tawaffuq leadership for being out of the country and thus being unable to negotiate with the Shia Coalition. Shahrastani said that the Coalition was seeking a meeting March 6 with the Kurdish Alliance and Tawaffuq leadership in order to convince them not to call the parliament later this week. Shahrastani noted that there is no agreement on the government coalition arrangement. The Shia prefer, therefore, that it not be held.

DAWA TANZIM FIRM FOR JAFARI

BAGHDAD 00000707 002 OF 003

14. (S) Dawa Tanzim leader Dr. Khudayr Musa al-Khuza'i told us March 5 that Dawa and Dawa Tanzim officials met March 3 with KDP leader Massoud Barzani to discuss PM Jafari's recent trip to Turkey. According to Dr. al-Khuza'i, the List 555 officials told Barzani that the trip to Turkey was to strengthen bilateral relations, that the Kurds had been invited, and that there was no secret message - no sane politician would meet the enemy of his allies. Barzani reportedly promised to resolve the Kurdish ire against Jafari, a process that al-Khuza'i thought could take days. (Comment: we doubt that Barzani was sincere making such a promise even if he did say such a thing. End Comment.)

15. (C) When asked about the letters from the Kurdish Alliance, Tawafuq, and the National Iraqi list to List 555 and SCIRI leader Abdulaziz al-Hakim opposing the nomination of Jafari, Dr. al-Khuza'i rejected interference from any party the Shia Coalition's affairs. He added that a Jafari withdrawal would be humiliating for the Shia Coalition and the Shia as a whole.

16. (C) Dr. al-Khuza'i added that there are spontaneous reactions in the street, with rallies supporting Jafari's nomination and signs stating that Iraq is an Arab country and needs an Arab President (a swipe at Jalal Talabani, a Kurd). He also said the Shia public believes that the U.S. has been plotting with the Kurds. He stated that the U.S. should intervene with the Kurds to convince them to accept Jafari. He said the U.S. is sending the wrong message to the insurgents and terrorists.

17. (C) When asked what will happen if the Kurds, Tawafuq, and the National Iraqi List continue to refuse support for Jafari's nomination, Dr. al-

Khuza'i said the situation will remain as is, with the ITG governing under the TAL. When told that the Presidency Council may call the Council of Representatives (CoR) into session by the end of this week, he said nobody in the Shia Coalition would respond to the call. PolOff reminded him that Abd al-Mahdi is on the Presidency Council. He stated that, if some part of the Shia Coalition attends the opening session, it would mean the dissolution of the Coalition and end to united Shia participation in government.

SCIRI OPEN TO DUMPING JAFARI

¶8. (C) In a March 5 meeting with Poloffs, prominent SCIRI member Redha Jawad Taki confirmed SCIRI's openness to alternatives to Jafari for PM. Taki explained SCIRI hopes that Jafari will voluntarily relinquish the nomination once he loses Sadrism support. Taki said that while SCIRI would prefer to see Abd al-Mahdi become PM, Abd al-Madhi has would only accept the PM nomination if the Shia Coalition unanimously endorsed him. Taki added that Qassim Daoud, Jawad al-Maliki and Hussein al-Shahrastani could be likely PM candidates. Taki doubted that Fadilah leader Nadim al-Jabiri would have another chance because he has little support from within the Coalition.

SHIA INDEPENDENT ACCEPTING A CHANGE TOO

¶9. (C) Shia Coalition Independent and Council of Representatives (CoR) member Shaikh Khalid Abathar Attiyah on March 5 admitted to us that Jafari's PM nomination was a mistake. He explained that it was wrong for the Coalition to move forward with his nomination, knowing that Ja'fari was a "hard sell" to all parties inside and outside the Coalition. Attiyah considered the three letters sent by outside parties to Abdul Aziz al-Hakim rejecting Jafari's nomination as insulting, but understandable. Attiyah added that the problem is one the List 555 group must fix; others should stay out of internal Coalition issues.

¶10. (C) Attiyah said it is clear that Najaf marja'ia wants the Shia Coalition to remain

BAGHDAD 00000707 003 OF 003

unified. He added that there are two options: (1) convince other parties to accept Jafari and see what terms they offer; or (2) convince Jafari to voluntarily step down. He opined that Ayatollah Sistani himself could convince Jafari. Attiyah said Grand Ayatollah Sistani and his son Mohammed Ridha probably are willing to influence political events indirectly. Attiyah added that Sadrists are reasonable and could be flexible about conceding on Jafari.

¶11. (C) If Jafari were to relinquish the PM nomination, Attiyah lamented that List 555 would be unlikely to re-nominate SCIRI's Adil Abd al-Mahdi whom he called "damaged goods." Attiyah said his second choice would be TNA Deputy Speaker Hussein al-Shahrastani. Attiyah indicated that both Qassim Daoud and Nadim al-Jabiri lack support within the Coalition, but he opined that Shahrastani was amenable to all groups, is a good administrator and has experience.

¶12. (C) Tawaffuq Front and Iraqi Islamic Party (IIP) leader Tariq al-Hashimi told a press conference in Amman March 4 that Tawafuq would not accept Jafari as PM. He also said Tawafuq is discussing with the Kurdish Alliance and the Allawi National List creating a broader political front. IIP leader Ayad al-Samarai'e told Poloff March 5 that Tawafuq has written to the Kurdish leadership saying that it had issues with the draft national front program it had received from the Kurds and Allawi. On March 6, Ala' Mekki, also of IIP, told Poloff that Tawafuq plans to meet with the Kurds in the next several days to agree on a front program. Mekki stressed that IIP leader Tariq al-Hashimi's public comments March 4 on government formation reflect the views of all the Tawafuq parties. Meanwhile, Iraqi Front for National Dialogue leader Saleh Mutlaq told Poloff March 6 from South Africa that he had not joined the Tawafuq leaders in signing the letter opposing Jafari. Mutlak said that he does not support Jafari. However, he wants a clear strategy from the Kurds about ministerial appointments. When asked his preference for Prime Minister, Mutlak said he would support former PM Allawi or a similarly liberal, non-sectarian candidate.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) The initial umbrage among Shia politicians like Shahrastani and Khuza'i about the Kurdish and Sunni Arab opposition to the Shia candidate Jafari is predictable. We expect some quiet and intense discussions about Jafari's future within the Coalition, and pulling in the Najaf clerics, during the days ahead. We do not expect a rapid decision from the Shia. The Sunni Arab leadership's absence from Iraq (they are visiting states in the region) suggests that the national front they are discussing with the Kurds also will take at least some days to put together. Since the Kurds and the Sunni Arabs disagree on many national political issues, drawing up an agreed front program could be harder than just expressing opposition to Ibrahim Jafari.

KHALILZAD